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A CRITICISM

On the late Reverend

Mr. *Holland's* SERMONS.

IN A

LETTER to a FRIEND.

Art in Perfection, bluſhing ſhuns the Light.
A Critic Eye diſcerns the hidden Skill,
Her modeſt Air admiring: Vulgar Hearts
Feel too her Force: Dull Souls alone deride.

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

PREFACE.

COmpendiums and abſtracts being now the reigning taſte in the learned world, many, who ſhall happen to caſt their eye upon this preface, may probably be deſirous to be informed of the author's deſign in the following performance, without the trouble of a peruſal. He is very willing to excuſe ſuch; and give a full ſatisfaction to their curioſity, by honeſtly confeſſing, that, if he may believe his own conſcience, his principal deſign is to do good to thoſe, and thoſe only, who ſhall do him the honour of peruſing it thoroughly, and with good intention.

A CRITICISM

On the late Reverend

Mr. *Holland's* SERMONS, &c.

SIR,

AGreeably to your deſire, I ſend you my ſentiments concerning Mr. *Holland's* ſermons: which you juſtly wonder to hear cenſured by ſome of your acquaintance, as looſe and inaccurate compoſitions. Such critics ſurely forget that our own character lies at ſtake, whenever we praiſe or blame. One of them may deſerve that cenſure; I mean, the firſt in the ſecond volume. But I freely forgive the inaccuracy and indifference of moſt part of it, for the ſake of a few pages in the cloſe, which is ſo nervous, ſpirited, and

and affectionate. As for all the reſt, if a piece of painting has therefore no deſign, becauſe it has not an inſcription explaining the whole ſtory: if method conſiſteth in a ſet of figures prefixed to the ſeveral particulars, and in the exact calculation of their ſum: we muſt allow, Sir, they are not methodical. But if it conſiſts in the choice of one ſubject, in keeping that continually in view, in ſelecting out of all the thoughts that occur to you, ſuch as are at once the moſt important in themſelves, and do more properly belong to that than any other ſubject, in ranging them ſo well, that the order, in which they ſtand, may itſelf contribute to their ſtrength and beauty, giving an additional perſpicuity to your illuſtrations, confirming your arguments, and enforcing your perſuaſions: ſo that ſhould a raſh hand preſume to cancel a paragraph, as appearing to him ſuperfluous, a better critic would find a flaw; or ſhould he tranſpoſe one, confuſion would enſue: if this be method, few ſermons are more methodical. Whoever has a notion of compoſition, will eaſily trace the order, and diſcern in each of them an union of deſign and ſtrict coherence throughout the whole: and as for thoſe who

have

have not, I know no Sermons, nor any kind of Engliſh diſcourſes, which are more proper to be recommended to ſuch as a means of acquiring it. For critical ſkill, and art in ſpeaking and writing, is no otherwiſe to be acquired, than by converſing much with the beſt models.

As cenſorious and bigotted as the world is repreſented, it ſeldom happens that an ill aſperſion is caſt upon any one, which he hath not in any meaſure deſerved, either by his guilt or his imprudence. And I am ſenſible, there are ſeveral peculiarities in our friend's manner, which ſeem to have led ſome into the charge of inaccuracy: you will give me leave, Sir, freely to point them out, in order to make the moſt candid and juſt apology, I can, for their criticiſm.

One peculiarity in him is a redundancy of ſentiment. For this he is very remarkable: and by this natural infelicity, for it could not be affectation, he was forced to apoſtatize from the modiſh way. If ever he laid down a particular head or branch of diſcourſe, he could not expatiate upon it as moſt others do. He could not confine himſelf to that ſingle thought, nor repeat and again repeat it in other words. Such,

I con-

I confeſs, was his poverty in language! But he either explains the deſcription given in that head of diſcourſe, or confirms the argument, or enforces the motive, by a train of obſervations, as many in number almoſt as his ſentences are. And theſe are ſo contrived, that while each corroborates the main point, yet it has a compleat ſenſe, and ſuch as is important in itſelf, without reference to ſomething further. Now a curſory reader or a careleſs hearer, who is not much accuſtomed to this manner, may overlook that reference, may conſider them as ſo many detached ſentences, and therefore condemn the whole as *a looſe eſſay*. Yet even ſuch an one will confeſs him to be very edifying. And this, methinks, deſerves to be celebrated as a diſtinguiſhing excellence in him, that while they, who are moſt attentive and judicious, will admire him moſt; the ſuperficial alſo, who ſcarcely deſerve it, may yet receive improvement.

Another peculiarity in him is a ſly, imperceptible way of tranſition. This, I think, ought to be forgiven him: becauſe, it is not more his fault, than owing to the very nature of truth, which is one thing, and perfectly conſiſtent in all its branches. For, con-

conſequently there is a certain natural connection betwixt thoſe arguments, that conſpire in demonſtrating one point. And, to find out that connection, is the buſineſs of a ſtudent, that he may conduct us, ſo much the more eaſily and convincingly, through them to the grand end in view. A vulgar eye is apt to gaze with pleaſure on the ſtrongeſt and moſt glaring colours: but a better judge in painting delights to ſee them artfully run into one another.

Beſides, his ſentiments being ſo diſpoſed as to be eaſily apprehended, and ſeeming in a manner to ſuggeſt one another, no wonder if the hearers are ſometimes ready to flatter themſelves, that they had conceived them before they were expreſſed; and challenge to themſelves the preacher's merit, not once reflecting, how much their invention is indebted to his accuracy and elaborate art.

Another peculiarity in him, is a moſt eaſy, familiar ſtile: very different indeed from what the faſhionable taſte often pronounces great or elegant. You, Sir, who have ſeriouſly ſtudied the art of compoſition, muſt be ſenſible, what is the natural, and in fact the common error in thoſe writers, who abound in ſentiment, and are continually heaping

heaping argument on argument, as faſt as words can expreſs them. They crowd ideas too much, mock our attention, and bewilder us in a confuſed, embarraſſed ſtile. Yet it is remarkable, and to me ſomewhat ſurprizing, that when hardly any divine is richer in ſentiment, none certainly writes more eaſily and clearly than our ingenious friend. He does not abound in epithets, in bold figures and alluſions, in ſubtle refinements, in arbitrary diſtinctions, in double meanings, nor in quaint turns and witticiſms, nor many other decorations, that are at preſent in ſuch high vogue, that without them, it ſeems, truth itſelf appears unamiable. He does not endeavour to magnify his thoughts by a pompous ſublimity in his words: neither does he dextrouſly obſerve the meaſures of a certain preciſe and uniform elegance: and he is pretty ſingular in this reſpect alſo, that he very ſeldom indulges any poetical flights in his ſentiment, but never in his diction: ſuch flights, in the latter way eſpecially, as you obſerve in ſeveral admired authors, who ſeem deſirous, we ſhould think it condeſcenſion in them, that they write in proſe at all. But he made the juſt diſtinction betwixt proſe and poetry, that each has a

beauty peculiar to itſelf. I remember his arch caution, " *They, who are born to walk* " *on foot, ſhould not attempt to fly.*"——He never departed from his own rule: and in ſeveral inſtances, where his ſentiment is grand and truly poetical, it is remarkable, how he ſoftens the expreſſion, and diſpoſes the words ſo that he may not ſeem guilty of any poetical affectation. Such modeſty, you well obſerved, Sir, is no leſſening, but highly graceful in a proſe-writer: whereas poetry is by nature rapturous, ſoaring, and intrepid.

He ſtrictly obſerves the peculiar idiom of our language, which it may be, is rather defective in particles. He does not therefore abound in copulatives, disjunctives and the like: but happily ſupplies that defect by the natural connection of his thoughts, which helps to make his ſtile flow ſmoothly and agreeably. His words are truly Engliſh, and the moſt common that the polite world uſes. They are never technical, nor philoſophical, nor foreign, nor new and arbitrary, nor ambiguous: but the plaineſt and moſt expreſſive, not needing to be explained by others. They are alſo very harmoniouſly diſpoſed: yet, as was obſerved, hardly ever

in a poetical manner. His periods are neither whimſically conciſe and abrupt, nor tedious, long, and ſuffocating. Neither are they affectedly uniform; but pleaſe the ear with a free variety of cadence. But his misfortune is, that his language is ſo very natural, that you would think nothing eaſier than to write as well: upon which account, Sir, you muſt expect your favourite to be undervalued as a low indifferent writer; at leaſt for ſome time. This has often been the fate of more eminent writers.

Another peculiarity in our friend is a certain air of modeſty: which, you will own, to have been a characteriſtic foible in his manner, as not commanding the popular reverence. He does not diſplay himſelf in frequent egotiſms, aſſumes no authority, makes no pompous introductions to his diſcourſes: nor concludes with any vaunting inferences; never ſeeming to compliment himſelf upon his plainneſs and familiarity, his comprehenſiveneſs, or the irreſiſtible force of his demonſtration. He chuſes rather to diſappear, and ſhews the like ſimplicity and energy in his compoſition, as you remember he did in his grave delivery, which engaged the attention of his hearers, not to

himſelf, but to the word ſpoken. He propoſeth naked arguments, unadorned with any thing beſide the light of truth: ſuch as generally produce conviction, before he has aſſerted the concluſion. He always examines and reaſons without reſerve, is never dogmatical, nor in the leaſt ſupercilious: but delights to be upon a level with any, whom he ſuppoſes to be in different ſentiments from his own, and allows them all fair play.

When I read this admonition in the late biſhop of *Durham's* charge, "*Never propoſe any objections in form: but rather endeavour to prevent, than to raiſe and confute them*;" I admired it greatly, and thought it inviolable: yet when I ſee what excellent uſe Mr. *Holland* generally makes of the objecting and anſwering method, that rule, like all others, appears to have its exceptions. Let me produce an inſtance out of his 11th ſermon. "*But you will object*, (ſays he,) "*If I had had good parents, I could have done and endured all you have told me: but mine are ſo peeviſh*, &c." Read the anſwer; at the cloſe of which are theſe words: "*If their temper is impaired and ſoured in any degree, this may be in a great*

" *a great meaſure owing to the toils and* " *anxieties, they have daily endured upon* " *your account.*" In like manner, he always propoſes objections in their full force, and preſently converts them into the ſtrongeſt arguments in favour of the duty, he is recommending. Thus while other preachers ſeem willing to overawe their antagoniſts below them by peremptory injunctions and imperious airs; he mildly expoſtulates with his brethren, and ſubdues their conſciences by a dextrous uſe of the weapons, they bring againſt him. Yet, I fear, this modeſt, this ingenuous and familiar manner will be cenſured by ſome as trivial, and by others, as much too condeſcending, even mean, and unworthy the truth of chriſtian laws, which are eternal, infallible, and ought not to be called in queſtion: and beſide this, altogether beneath the ſacred dignity of the pulpit, and the venerable character of an ambaſſador of Chriſt. Neither, Sir, will it be ſo devoutly heard by many of the laity, as a haughtier way would be. For the world, even in this age of boaſted freedom, loves to be bullied, and lorded over. Indeed licentiouſneſs produces ignorance, and in conjunction with it,

ſt, begets that which appears to be moſt oppoſite to itſelf, even the abject ſpirit of ſlavery. So it was in our Lord's time. The people ſubmitted to the pretenſions of their blind and domineering guides, rather than to his authority; although he ſpoke in the name of God his father; but then, he ſpoke in the way of reaſon alſo, and appealed to their conſciences. No wonder therefore, if his miniſters happen to be ſometimes leſs eſteemed for their condeſcenſion, mildneſs, and modeſty.

But how little ſoever the ſimple and unaffected manner may be reliſhed by the loweſt vulgar, who love to ſtare upon what is myſterious and bombaſt, (a diſpoſition that ought not to be indulged and played upon, but induſtriouſly corrected;) it was with reaſon a very agreeable entertainment to you, Sir, to recognize in Mr. *Holland*'s ſermons the antient manner, with which you have had ſuch an intimate acquaintance. For ſcarcely any one underſtood the antient moraliſts better than he. Few ever imbibed more largely of their ſpirit, or ſo happily transfuſed it into our language.

Upon conſidering the great variety of authors, antient and modern, whom he has adopted,

adopted, and how much they differ from one another, having each his peculiar manner; I am not a little ſurprized, Sir, to obſerve in his improvement of them, how perfectly he has reconciled them all in one conſiſtent model of writing. This diſcovers a genius truly excellent. For an inferior one, with equal learning, would have given us an unſavoury hotchpotch, ſuch an injudicious mixture of the ſweeteſt ſimples, as you know, Sir, makes up the moſt ſickly potion. But he, in the whole courſe of his imitation, knew himſelf, and ſtill followed the bent of nature, which inclined him more to purſue the eaſy manner of *Simplicius*, and the elegance of *Xenophon*, than the rapturous ſtrain of *Plato*, the perſuaſive flouriſh of *Cicero*, or the force of *Demoſthenes*. And you will never find him imitating any, but when he could at the ſame time give ſcope to his own genius. Such was his caution and modeſty! And ſo effectually was he ſecured from all affectation, ſervility, and apiſhneſs!

Nay, what ſeemed to put him in danger of falling into ſome inconſiſtencies in his manner, I mean his improvement of ſuch a variety of authors, appears upon ſecond

cond thoughts to have been his very ſecurity. For that youth is moſt likely to be aukward and apiſh, who always ſtays at home, and has no other example than that of his father before his eyes: and they only, who go abroad into the world, and converſe familiarly with a great variety of characters, are in a way to learn a free and genteel behaviour. In like manner they, who ſtudy one favourite author only, are in greater danger of falling into ſomething affected and ſervile, than they are, who, like our yet lamented friend, have a general acquaintance with the moſt eminent maſters. For having acquired a compleat idea of the characteriſtic manner of each, he thereby learned a certain propriety, conſiſtency, and oneneſs of ſtile and ſentiment, and ſucceſsfully purſued it in his own compoſitions: where, the pureſt philoſophy of the heathens, judiciouſly ſecreted and collected into one ſyſtem, and impregnated with the genuine ſpirit of chriſtianity, is delivered to us in the common language of the world, and recommended by all the graces of a ſimple and unaffected accuracy.

You will therefore heartily join with me, Sir, in wiſhing, there was leſs reaſon to have ranked this alſo among his peculiarities, that he thought, there was any juſtice due to thoſe poor benighted writers: that he diſcovered any moral truth interſperſed among their errors; and ventured, like St. *Paul*, to improve it to Chriſtian purpoſes: deviating from the example of more eſteemed divines in his own time, whoſe zeal and prudence incline them to diſavow all manner of friendſhip, if not alſo the leaſt criminal acquaintance, with thoſe devoted infidels.

But, to the everlaſting honour of the goſpel, it is certain, as your experience, Sir, teſtifies, (and would to God it were openly maintained by all its miniſters!) that a man will be ſo much the more diſpoſed to embrace ſound chriſtianity for being a man of letters, a ſound and compleat philoſopher. St. *Paul* thought ſo: and, in his ſpeech before the *Athenians*, appears to be highly pleaſed, when he could appeal to their own poets, for a confirmation of his doctrine. And how much ſoever chriſtian preachers may differ in different ages: chriſtianity itſelf is ſtill the ſame, and in ours as well as in his day, *vaunteth not itſelf, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity*, triumphs

not in the ignorance and ſuperſtition of others, *but rejoiceth in the truth*, where-ever it is to be found, among its friends or enemies, believers or unbelievers, *Jews* or *Gentiles*.

By this time, Sir, you will eaſily gueſs my opinion concerning theſe compoſitions, conſidered as ſermons. To ſay they are any thing elſe rather than what they were deſigned to be, is almoſt the ſevereſt cenſure: yet, I muſt own, that three of them, the firſt on anger, the firſt on compaſſion, and the ſecond on friendſhip, and to theſe might perhaps be added, that on the foundation of virtue; are rather philoſophical diſſertations, and ſeem not to have a ſufficient importance in them, to be addreſſed to a common audience; which ought always to be engaged in what has a more direct influence upon life and conduct. It is not neceſſary, that a patient be let into the myſteries of the medical ſcience. See his introduction to the firſt of theſe ſermons. "*But* "*ought not every man to be his own phyſician?*" It were indeed to be wiſhed he was. "*But* "*if he will not*, (as he uſed to ſay,) *it is not in* "*your power to do him ſervice. I aſk no more* "*from any man in a religious aſſembly, than a* "*diſpoſition to better himſelf: if he has not* "*that, what buſineſs has he there? and if he*

"*has*,

" *has, he will not be averſe to half an hour's*
" *meditation upon the frame of his own mind;*
" *what principles are implanted in it, and for*
" *what purpoſes. However, this ſpeculative*
" *way ſhould be uſed very ſeldom, and with*
" *great caution, that it be not too abſtracted.*"
This was his ſentiment. Yet it does not ſatisfy me entirely. And although perhaps no ſermons can be, and certainly none ever were, written more plainly upon the like ſubjects: yet I would join with any of our divines in condemning the four ſermons abovementioned, and profeſs my conſent to diſcard all ſuch for ever from the pulpit, upon this condition, and I appeal to you, Sir, if it be not a very fair condition: that they will alſo confine themſelves to practical ſubjects, and to the great arguments, with which chriſtianity enforces our duty; keeping off thoſe myſterious points of ſcholaſtic divinity, which are ſo aſtoniſhing to common ſenſe, and in which the learned preachers, as well as the moſt illiterate of their admirers, ſeem to be ſometimes pitifully bewildered and confounded.

The reſt of the ſermons are, in my opinion, altogether unexceptionable as ſuch. They are plain, entertaining, and important. The language is pure, and conveys the ſenſe with

the utmoſt eaſe and clearneſs to all, whether learned, polite, or vulgar. The reaſoning is always conciſe, yet full: for none of the ſteps are omitted, nor any by-obſervations inſerted: and, being ſo regular, it is diſcerned throughout its whole proceſs by any common hearer; or ſhould his attention happen to be diverted for a time, he may eaſily enter again into his meaning and deſign.

His deſcriptions of men and manners are ſo natural, that no perſon can well help recollecting ſome inſtances in his own, or the lives of others, whence they might have been taken. A moſt delicate and hazardous work this! in which he ſhews an exact judgment. Indeed, he might allow himſelf the greater freedom in this way, as being an occaſional preacher. For otherwiſe I am afraid he would ſometimes have incurred the cenſure of pointing at particular characters. His hearers could not but apply ſuch and ſuch things to themſelves, or their neighbours; and therefore to be ſure, "*He meant to apply them ſo.*" I muſt confeſs however, that in the paſſages, which are liable to that ill-natured miſconſtruction; the ſentiments ſeem to riſe ſo naturally out of his ſubject, that every one would be able to make an apology for him. And while a preacher obſerves

obſerves this accuracy, never ſeeming to go out of his way, I believe, Sir, you will allow, that he ought not to be overawed, nor be deterred from a juſt propriety by the fear of groundleſs cenſure. Honeſty is good; prudence is alſo good: and as you well know, Sir, they are never inconſiſtent, but each of them ſhines the brighter, when they are in conjunction.

In the whole courſe of his preaching, he gave a juſt idea of God, of his moral government, and the deſign of his goſpel by Jeſus Chriſt, of man and his natural powers, and of the importance of a good life to our happineſs both preſent and future. He did not *bring up an evil report* of the way of virtue, as the jewiſh *ſpies did of the land of Canaan*, ſaying, "*The land, through which we have* "*gone to ſearch it, is a land that eateth up the* "*inhabitants thereof: and all the people, that* "*we ſaw in it, are men of a great ſtature.* "*And there we ſaw the giants: and we were* "*in our own ſight as graſhoppers. We be not* "*able to go up againſt the people; for they are* "*ſtronger than we.*" He had not any ſuch hideous view of our ſpiritual enemies; but with the more courageous *Caleb*, he comforted the people, ſaying, "*Let us go up at once*

"*and*

" *and poſſeſs it, for we are well able to over-*
" *come it.*"

In this principle, *God has linked virtue with happineſs, and vice with miſery*, his arguments are founded, and are therefore the moſt proper and perſuaſive, and truly generous. They are plain alſo, judicious, orderly and conſiſtent. When he is declaiming againſt any vice, he never forgets to urge ſuch arguments, as cannot but touch the heart of the guilty, if they have any generoſity and goodneſs yet remaining: or if they ſhould be hardened and abandoned, he boldly reminds them of thoſe complicated miſeries, with which they have already been puniſhed, and alarms their fears of yet worſe to come, both in this and the future ſtate. When he is recommending any virtue, he does not inſiſt too much upon thoſe conſiderations, which they, who are poſſeſſed of that virtue in an eminent degree, would bluſh to own for their ruling motives: but principally urges thoſe, that ſtrike immediately upon our better and more honourable principles. I do not find in his ſermons, and I wiſh, Sir, it were impoſſible to find in any others, a plain inconſiſtency betwixt the precept in the text and the arguments, with which it is inculcated; as when the duty of

ſelf-

ſelf-denial is preached up in ſuch a melancholy ſtrain, as is far from ſhowing a free indifference of the heart towards thoſe ſenſual pleaſures, that ſeem ſo cruelly prohibited: or when charity towards them who differ from us in religious ſentiments, is inforced by this argument, *viz.* that we are *commanded* to forbear and forgive one another, *&c. &c.* Inaccuracies! the moſt ridiculous and ſhameful, which are hardly to be forgiven a preacher, becauſe he undermines his own work, and counteracts the very end of preaching.

And while his arguments are accurately juſt, they are alſo ſtrong, and ſtill riſing in importance. So far as we are moral agents, he thought we chriſtians were born under the ſame law as the heathens; and therefore, with whatever arguments he found any moral virtues juſtly inculcated in their writings, he did not ſcruple to urge them along with others, that occurred to his own mind. Yet, he never forgets, that he is ſpeaking to chriſtians, but argues from our profeſſion and avowed principles, and frequently appeals to the holy ſcripture, as of equal, becauſe of the ſame authority with the dictates of natural conſcience. For, as this is the voice of God within us, ſo are they the words of God, ſpeaking to us by

by his ſon Jeſus, in a diſtincter, fuller, and more powerful manner.

And in more particular inſtances alſo, his arguments are well adapted to the characters, to which they are addreſſed: witneſs his diſcourſe to children, which I remember you juſtly mentioned, Sir, as admirable for its propriety, and the eaſineſs of its ſtile, and I no leſs admire for its ſtrength and elegance. To inſtruct children, is what all allow to be important, yet many of us are apt to deſpiſe, as being ſo very eaſy, and fitter for inferior perſons. But, to do it ſo as at the ſame time to give entertainment and improvement to thoſe of riper years, requires no mean talent: and I wiſh they, who think otherwiſe, would take that work in hand, and try to do it even to their own ſatisfaction. Whoever can do this well, may eaſily acquire the art of addreſſing a common audience. For, how ſtrange ſoever it may ſeem, fact verifies the obſervation, that it is more difficult to ſpeak with propriety to your inferiors, than to your equals or ſuperiors in knowledge. Yet why ſhould this be thought ſtrange? ſince the latter need no information nor conviction: and are therefore never at a loſs; but ſhould you even commit a miſtake, are able to correct it of

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themſelves, and go along with your meaning and deſign. Whereas, your inferiors are manifeſtly ſlow in their conceptions, confuſed, prepoſſeſſed, and generally of a falſe taſte. They ſtumble upon every pebble. The concealment of any one ſtep, though ever ſo obvious to a perſon of learning, ſhall break the ſtrongeſt chain of reaſoning. A parentheſis that is rather too long, a circumlocution, or the prepoſterous diſpoſition of one member in a ſentence, bewilders them. An alluſion, or a metaphorical expreſſion, which the preacher himſelf may be apt to admire as very pretty, or a powerful enforcement, if it be not fetched from thoſe things, about which they are very converſant, ſhall not perhaps be underſtood at all: or if it be, ſhall ſometimes ſerve only to divert their attention from the main thing; which is a worſe, and a more common fault. The omiſſion of a ſingle word, or, which is the ſame, a hard uncommon one, ſhall puzzle them through a whole ſentence or two, and deſtroy the force of a laboured argument. Theſe, and a thouſand other difficulties, miſerably cramp a preacher; and ſhew that he has occaſion for the moſt comprehenſive genius, as well as a ſolid judgment: the one, to ſuggeſt a va-

riety of ſentiments; the other, to cull ſuch as will be uſeful and agreeable to a mixed audience. But he ought not to deſpair, nor ſink into an indolence and careleſſneſs, nor think himſelf excuſed, by any difficulties or pretences, from aiming at a ſtrict propriety, and all the other graces of eloquence. Whoever would deſerve the character of a popular preacher, ſhould endeavour, like our ingenious friend, ſo to adapt himſelf to his hearers, as not only to be plain and intelligible to every one, but pleaſing alſo, alarming and affecting.

For he, while he aims at the art of addreſs, does not fall into a certain ſcrupulous modeſty: which quite enervates a diſcourſe, making it too lax, dry, and unintereſting; and from which, I believe, Sir, proceeds that diſtant manner of addreſs, that calm, ſmooth, and very complaiſant ſtile, now ſo faſhionable, which elderly people are apt to impute to a want of Godly zeal, and deſpiſe upon a compariſon with the more ſtriking and affectionate manner of Mr. *Baxter* and ſome others. We in return too commonly laugh at their bigotry, as we call it. So ſoon do we loſe that modeſty, that gave riſe to the cenſure! But methinks, a ſerious

preacher

preacher will not be unconcerned, if his manner is ſuch, as even appears lukewarm to thoſe, who it may be are better than himſelf. And taking it for granted, that his eloquence, becauſe unacceptable, is not therefore of a genuine and moſt exalted kind; he will diligently inquire where the fault lies, examine again and again his own heart, and be ambitious after that well-conducted zeal; which, for his encouragement, I dare promiſe any one, will be eaſily attained, and will ſeldom fail of pleaſing thoſe, who are ſincerely good. We ſhould therefore, Sir, follow our friend's example, who was diſcreetly modeſt, and, never indulging a timid delicacy, but giving full ſcope to his genius, ſeemed to regard no other authority than that of truth and the God of truth.

He always ſhews a ſpirit of moderation, candour, and charity. This excellence does not indeed appear to me to deſerve a very high commendation, for a like reaſon, as that which inclines me to think it no very commendable excellence in a parent, to diſcover love for his offspring. For this affection is ſo natural to the relation, that I do not remember to have ever heard any one highly commended for ſhewing it: whereas every

one that has betrayed the want of it is univerſally deteſted as a monſter. So I always hold, that a ſpirit of charity is alſo natural, nay even eſſential to a real miniſter of the goſpel, the goſpel of peace and love: and that, whatever may be pretended, it is no leſs repugnant to the views and temper of the leader of a faction, or the dupe of ſlaves and bigots.

If hiſtory informed us of a nation, where the exerciſe of parental affection was generally reckoned a rare and extraordinary virtue, like that of public ſpiritedneſs among us, it would appear to us more thoroughly ſavage and barbarous, than ever the Hottentots were repreſented by the moſt fabulous writers. And methinks, Sir, it is a very ſevere reflection, we paſs upon Britiſh chriſtendom, whenever we celebrate the moderation of a chriſtian divine, as a rare and diſtinguiſhing excellence. For moderation is only a freedom from bigotry; which is of two kinds; conſiſting either in the ſerious demand that our neighbours ſhall be of our faith, or in a violent attempt to force them to an external profeſſion of it: the former is to the laſt degree ridiculouſly fooliſh, and the latter moſt heinouſly unjuſt and impious.

I ſhould

I ſhould be very ſorry therefore, if our friend's moderation, or his love of virtue and piety, were a characteriſtic mark, whereby he might be critically diſtinguiſhed from other preachers.

He never deſcends into low and uſeleſs controverſy; nor ſanctifies his ſermons with the minute tenets of any chriſtian party. For this reaſon they are eſteemed by the free and moderate. But for this reaſon, it was alſo to be expected, Sir, that they would not be univerſally acceptable to any party; that ignorant enthuſiaſts would reject them for mere dry moral ſtuff, and that ſome of ſuperior knowledge, hardly allowing them to be ſermons, would only ſpeak well of them in the character of philoſophical eſſays. He often received ſuch a compliment as this, when living, and was highly diverted with it. But it was his oddity to be determined by what he thought was right, and becoming him as a philoſopher and divine, without conſidering the conſequences.

He is never ſtudious therefore, to recommend himſelf to thoſe, who lay an undue ſtreſs upon ſuch abſtruſe points, as have been differently determined by the wiſeſt and beſt men in all ages. He is never guilty of

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the leaſt prevarication, nor complaiſant ſtruggling for old words under a new and ſpecious meaning. That faſhionable dexterity! which it ſeems, ſo happily gives a general ſatisfaction. For by virtue of this charm, the preacher becomes like the Janus of the Romans: and each party exults in his authority, fancying him to look its own way only. Thus the whole audience is pacified, without much prejudice to the poor illiterate vulgar. For they, honeſt ſouls! have ſuch a devout reverence for religion, that they never once think it poſſible for a man, and leaſt of all for their ſpiritual guide, to ſhuffle and prevaricate in the very act of religion. But the effect is not altogether ſo harmleſs, which it has on others: who value themſelves upon knowing the world; who love to pry narrowly into the manners of men; and are highly diverted to eſpy inconſiſtency in any, eſpecially in that reverend order, where it is moſt miſchievous and deplorable. They ſee the double face; and, with the merry deiſts, deſpiſe religion in any other than a political ſenſe, and laugh at the ſolemn farce. As for thoſe few of greater learning, integrity, and benevolence: they generouſly pity any well-meaning divines, who may be deluded

into

into that inconſiſtency by the romantic hope of a comprehenſion: they are chagrined that any are ever tempted to act againſt their better judgment. They abhor to ſee religion, thus betrayed by its friends, and therefore inſulted by its enemies: yet ſtill remember, that it is of eternal and unchangeable obligation, and independent upon the humours of mankind. Being thus agitated by turns with grief and generous indignation, they reſt ſatisfied however in this thought: that truth and liberty, with which intereſt, virtue and piety, the public good, and private happineſs are all inſeparably connected, ſhall at laſt prevail, how few ſoever may as yet ſeem willing to be the honourable inſtruments, in maintaining it with a thorough conſiſtency.

You remember, Sir, with pleaſure, that our friend demonſtrated in his conduct, he had a juſt apprehenſion of the infinite prejudice, which is done to the chriſtian cauſe, by the inconſtancy, ſhuffling, and time-ſerving timidity of its miniſters. He diſcovered an utter abhorrence of all diſſimulation: and as I have often heard him ſay, that independency lies not in the circumſtances, but in the mind itſelf; ſo he had in fact ſuch a generous ſenſe of his own independency,

that

that he could not even be tempted to ſubmit to any inconſiſtency, or reſtraint, in profeſſing his religious ſentiments.

He never ſeemed to be anxious about a comprehenſion. "*An union of ſentiments,* "(he ſaid) *is not practicable; and an union of* "*voices in the uſe of a preſcribed form,* "*without that, is not very material.*" An union of heart and affections however he thought highly deſirable, and as a likely expedient for promoting it, he always engaged the attention of his hearers to thoſe moral and divine truths, which appeared to him to be of real importance to the conduct and happineſs of life.

It was an inſtance of his judgment, as well as his ingenuity, that he choſe for the moſt part to treat upon particular, rather than upon general ſubjects. His ſermons are not looſe harangues upon every thing: ſuch as you will often hear applauded, Sir, for copious and compleat diſcourſes. They are, as you obſerved, accurate compoſitions, contracting our view within a narrow compaſs, in order the better to illuſtrate ſome one point. He confirms or refutes ſome propoſition, and purſues it through it's moſt important conſequences, or he enforceth ſome

one

one virtue, or expoſeth ſome one vice, or gives ſage directions for the performance of ſome duty. It is true, mankind are to be tried by different ways; general diſcourſes therefore have their uſe, and ought to be ſometimes given: but thoſe which are more particular, as they are much more improving to the compoſer, ſo are they to his audience; they are, I apprehend, Sir, more inſtructive, more engaging and intereſting, more powerful and perſuaſive, forcing them in a manner to make the deſired application to their own hearts and lives. The only danger in this way is, leſt he ſhould be too particular, as our friend ſeems to be in ſome paſſages; which though very few, together with four or five improper tales, and as many ſingular phraſes, I could wiſh the learned editor had eraſed and corrected; but, it ſeems, he was too ſcrupulouſly faithful.

The four diſſertations excepted, which, not without ſome reluctance, you remember, I conſented to ſtrike out of the liſt of ſermons, I hardly know which of the reſt to admire moſt: and the ſevereſt critic, who underſtands any thing of compoſition, will agree with you, Sir, that if any one is to be preferred before another, it is only becauſe the

ſubject of it ſeems to be of greater importance. Vulgar readers I am ſenſible, will meaſure their merit, by the ſuitableneſs they have to their own condition, or rather, it may be to that of their neighbours. If any of them deſerve more than others to be recommended, I think they are that on Chriſt's example, that on conſidering our latter end, the laſt on friendſhip, and the ſix on relative duties. In theſe, as in all the reſt, he diſcovers that ſpirit of virtue and piety, which ought to animate the breaſt of every miniſter of the goſpel, and at the ſame time, that juſt taſte for happineſs, that thorough ſenſe of the value of this life and it's various enjoyments, which I always look for, but muſt confeſs do not always find, in their public performances.

God bleſs your ſtudies and labours, and be aſſured I am, *&c.*

M—— *Dec.* 25, 1754.

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